

What is claimed is:

1. A method of contacting a person using a universal point of contact identifier, the method comprising:
  - (a) receiving the universal point of contact identifier input into an initiating device;
  - 5 (b) locating, based on the universal point of contact identifier, a plurality of point of contact information for contacting the person;
  - (c) sending a request for the person's preferred point of contact information, the request including at least a portion of the universal point of contact identifier identifying the person;
  - 10 (d) receiving the person's preferred point of contact information; and
  - (e) automatically establishing a communication session between the initiating device and a preferred point of contact specified in the preferred point of contact information without sending the person's preferred point of contact information to the initiating device.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the initiating device is one of a telephone and a facsimile machine.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the plurality of point of contact information includes a telephone number for a facsimile device, a telephone number for a telephone and a mailing address.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the plurality of point of contact information is contained in a repository.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the universal point of contact identifier is an email address.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the person's email address consists of a user identification portion, a domain name portion and a demarcation symbol between the user identification and domain name portions.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the email address is of the form userid@domainname, wherein userid is the user identification portion which is an identifier for the person within a computing domain having the domain name portion designated by domainname.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the received preferred point of contact information is encrypted.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the request is encrypted.

10. The method of claim 1, further comprising,

(f) determining from the person's point of contact information an alternate point of contact if a communication session is not established with the preferred point of contact in(e); and

5 (g) establishing a communication session with the alternate point of contact.

11. The method of claim 1, further comprising, (f) recording a message if a communication session is not established with the preferred point of contact.

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12. The method of claim 11, further comprising, (g) attaching the recorded message to an email and sending the email to the person's email address.

13. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

(d1) if the received preferred point of contact information specifies a plurality of preferred points of contact, sending to the initiating device a message indicating the plurality of preferred points of contact to provide for selection of one of the plurality of preferred points of contact; and

(d2) receiving a selection message indicating selection of one of the plurality of preferred points of contact as the preferred point of contact with which to establish a communication session.

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

(e1) attempting to automatically establish a communication session with the selected preferred point of contact; and

(e2) automatically establishing a communication session with another of the plurality of preferred points of contact if a communication session is not established with the selected preferred point of contact.

15. The method of claim 1, wherein if the received preferred point of contact information specifies a plurality of preferred points of contact, attempting to automatically establish a communication session with one or more of the plurality of preferred points of contact.

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16. The method of claim 15, wherein the attempts to automatically establish a communication session using one or more of the plurality of preferred points of contact are performed in parallel.

17. The method of claim 15, wherein the attempts to automatically establish a communication session using one or more of the plurality of preferred points of contact are performed sequentially.

18. The method of claim 15, wherein the attempts to automatically establish a communication session using one or more of the plurality of preferred points of contact are performed by first attempting to establish a communication session using a primary preferred point of contact, and then attempting to establish a communication session  
5 using a secondary preferred point of contact if the first attempt is unsuccessful.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the attempt using the secondary preferred point of contact is performed by attempting to establish, in parallel, communication sessions using a plurality of secondary preferred points of contact.

20. A computer program embodied on a computer-readable medium, for contacting a person having a universal point of contact identifier at the person's preferred point of contact using the person's universal point of contact identifier, the computer program comprising:  
5 program instructions for receiving the person's universal point of contact identifier input into an initiating device;

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program instructions for locating, based on the person's universal point of contact identifier, a repository containing a plurality of point of contact information for contacting the person;

10        program instructions for sending to the repository a request for the person's preferred point of contact information, the request including at least a portion of the universal point of contact identifier identifying the person; and

15        program instructions for automatically establishing a communication session between the initiating device and the person's preferred point of contact in response to receiving the person's preferred point of contact information.

21.     The computer program of claim 20, wherein the universal point of contact identifier is an email address.

22.     The computer program of claim 21, wherein the person's email address consists of a user identification portion, a domain name portion and a demarcation symbol between the user identification and domain name portions.

23.     The computer program of claim 22, wherein the email address is of the form userid@domainname, wherein userid is the user identification portion which is an identifier for the person within a computing domain having the domain name portion designated by domainname.

24.     The computer program of claim 20, further comprising,  
program instructions for determining from the person's point of contact information an alternate point of contact if a connection is not established with the preferred point of contact; and

5 program instructions for establishing a connection with the alternate point of contact.

25. The computer program of claim 20, further comprising, program instructions for recording a message if a connection is not established with the preferred point of contact.

26. A requestor unit for connecting a communication initiator's initiating device to a recipient's preferred destination device, wherein the recipient has a universal point of contract identifier and the communication initiator enters the recipient's universal point of contact identifier into the initiating device to initiate a contact with the  
5 recipient, and a repository has recorded therein a plurality of point of contact information for contacting the recipient, the requestor unit comprising:

a network interface unit connected to a telephone network switch for receiving the universal point of contact identifier entered by the caller;

a control unit connected to the network interface unit, identifying the repository in  
10 response to receipt of the recipient's universal point of contact identifier; and

a repository interface unit connected to the control unit and to a data network for sending a request to the repository for the recipient's preferred point of contact information, and receiving in response to the request the recipient's preferred point of contact information,

15 wherein in response to receiving the recipient's preferred point of contact information the control unit operates to cause a communication session to be established between the initiator's device and a device identified by the recipient's preferred point of contact information.

27. The requestor unit of claim 26, wherein the universal point of contact identifier is an email address.

28. The requestor unit of claim 26, wherein the initiating device is a telephone with a universal point of contact identifier entry device having separate numeric and non-numeric entry units for entry of the universal point of contact identifier.

29. The requestor unit of claim 26, wherein in response to receiving the recipient's preferred point of contact information the control unit controls the switch to establish the communication session between the initiating device and the device identified by the recipient's preferred point of contact information.

30. The requestor unit of claim 29, wherein the universal point of contact identifier is an email address.

31. The requestor unit of claim 26, further comprising a requestor switch connected to the control unit and to a telephone network, wherein in response to receiving the recipient's preferred point of contact information the control unit controls the requestor switch to establish a communication session between the initiator's device  
5 and the device identified by the recipient's preferred point of contact information.

32. The requestor unit of claim 31, wherein the universal point of contact identifier is an email address.

33. The requestor unit of claim 26, wherein the network interface unit comprises a voice response unit receiving a voice signal generated by the communication initiator speaking the recipient's universal point of contact identifier and converting the

voice signal into a data signal comprising characters representing the universal point of  
5 contact identifier.

34. The requestor unit of claim 33, wherein the universal point of contact  
identifier is an email address.

35. The requestor unit of claim 26, wherein the received preferred point of  
contact information is encrypted, and the repository interface unit decrypts the received  
preferred point of contact information.

36. The requestor unit of claim 26, wherein the repository interface unit  
encrypts the request.

37. The requestor unit of claim 26, wherein the communication initiator enters  
the universal point of contact identifier by speaking the universal point of contact  
identifier, and the network interface unit comprising a voice recognition unit for  
converting the spoken universal point of contact identifier into a textual form for use in  
5 generating the request to send to the repository.

38. A method of locating, within a repository of point of contact information,  
information designating a person's preferred point of contact by an email address, the  
method comprising:

receiving a signal containing identification information that uniquely identifies  
5 the person within the repository, the identification information comprising at least a  
portion of the email address;



locating, based on the identification information, a collection of contact information for use in contacting the person;

- determining from among the collection of contact information the person's preferred point of contact; and
- 10     outputting point of contact information specifying the person's preferred point of contact.

39.     The method of claim 38, wherein the output point of contact information that specifies the person's preferred point of contact is for use in automatically establishing a communication session with the preferred point of contact.

40.     The method of claim 38, wherein the output point of contact information specifies a plurality of preferred points of contact.

41.     The method of claim 38, wherein the output point of contact information specifies a preferred mailing address for the person.

42.     The method of claim 38, wherein the output point of contact information is encrypted.

43.     The method of claim 38, wherein the received signal contains the complete email address.

44.     The method of claim 38, wherein the received signal contains an indicator of a desired type of contact, and the person's preferred point of contact is determined based on the desired type of contact indicated.

45. The method of claim 38, wherein the collection of point of contact information contains at least a telephone number, a facsimile number, and a mailing address, for contacting the person.

46. A computer program embodied on a computer-readable medium, for locating, within a repository of point of contact information, information specifying a person's preferred point of contact by using an email address, the program comprising:  
 program instructions for receiving a signal containing identification information  
 5 that uniquely identifies the person within the repository, the identification information comprising at least a portion of the email address;

program instructions for locating, based on the identification information, a collection of contact information for use in contacting the person;

10 program instructions for determining from among the collection of contact information the person's preferred point of contact; and

program instructions for outputting point of contact information specifying the person's preferred point of contact.

47. The computer program of claim 46, wherein the output point of contact information that specifies the person's preferred point of contact is for use in automatically establishing a communication session with the preferred point of contact.

48. The computer program of claim 46, wherein the output point of contact information specifies a plurality of preferred points of contact.

49. The computer program of claim 46, wherein the output point of contact information specifies a preferred mailing address for the person.

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50. The computer program of claim 46, wherein the output point of contact information is encrypted.

51. A point of contact repository, comprising:

a server connected to a network and receiving a request for information specifying a person's preferred point of contact, the request including at least a portion of an email address associated with the person; and

5 a storage unit storing a collection of point of contact information for use in contacting the person, wherein certain of the information is designated for a preferred point of contact at which the person prefers to be contacted,

wherein the server, in response to receiving the request for the person's point of contact information, locates the person's preferred point of contact information based on  
10 person's email address, and returns the located information.

52. The point of contact repository of claim 51, wherein the information in the request specifying the person is the person's complete email address.

53. The point of contact repository of claim 51, wherein the located preferred point of contact information is for use in automatically establishing a communication session with a device designated by the located preferred point of contact information.

54. The point of contact repository of claim 51, wherein the collection of point  
5 of contact information includes a telephone number for a facsimile device, a telephone number for a telephone, and a mailing address.

55. The point of contact repository of claim 51, wherein the returned preferred point of contact information is encrypted.

56. A method of interacting with a point of contact repository having a collection of point of contact information for a person and associated with that person's email address, the method comprising:

- identifying the person's collection of point of contact information; and
- 5 designating as a preferred point of contact one of the points of contact among the person's collection of point of contact information, wherein the preferred point of contact information is provided in response to a request initiated by a communication initiator attempting to contact the person, wherein the communication initiator initiates the request by entering the person's email address into an initiating device.

57. The method of claim 56, wherein the initiating device is one of a telephone and a facsimile machine.

58. A method of a first person contacting a second person using a universal point of contact identifier for the second person, the method comprising:

- the first person sending into a communications network, via an initiating device, a predetermined code to indicate initiation of a universal point of contact communication
- 5 session;

the first person sending into the communications network, via the initiating device, the second person's universal point of contact identifier, thereby causing a communication session to be established between the initiating device and a device designated as the second person's preferred contact point among a plurality of points of

10 contact for the second person, wherein the designated device responds to a device address that is different from the second person's universal point of contact identifier.

59. The method of claim 58, wherein the universal point of contact identifier is an email address.

60. The method of claim 59, wherein the initiating device is one of a telephone and a facsimile machine.

61. The method of claim 60, wherein the first person sends the universal point of contact identifier into the communications network by speaking the universal point of contact identifier.

62. A method of delivering a package to a person's preferred mailing address, the person having a universal point of contact identifier, and the package being addressed with the person's universal point of contact identifier, the method comprising:

inputting the person's universal point of contact identifier into an initiating  
5 device, wherein the person's universal point of contact identifier is different from the person's preferred mailing address;  
receiving, in response to inputting the person's universal point of contact identifier, the preferred mailing address that has been designated as a preferred delivery address; and  
10 delivering the package to the preferred mailing address.

63. The method of claim 62, wherein the universal point of contact identifier is an email address.

64. The method of claim 63, wherein the email address consists of a user identification portion, a domain name portion and a demarcation symbol between the user identification and domain name portions.

65. The method of claim 64, wherein the email address is of the form  
userid@domainname, wherein userid is the user identification portion which is an  
identifier for the person within a computing domain having the domain name portion  
designated by domainname.

66. A method of contacting a person who has a universal point of contact identifier, comprising:

entering the person's universal point of contact identifier into an initiating device:

selecting one of the indicators; and

67. The method of claim 66, wherein the person is contacted by automatically establishing a communication session between the initiating device and the point of contact indicated by the selected indicator.

68. The method of claim 66, wherein the person is contacted by presenting a mailing address corresponding to the selected indicator, and delivering a package to the mailing address.

69. The method of claim 66, wherein the universal point of contact identifier is an email address.

70. The method of claim 69, wherein the email address consists of a user identification portion, a domain name portion and a demarcation symbol between the user identification and domain name portions.

71. The method of claim 70, wherein the email address is of the form userid@domainname, wherein userid is the user identification portion which is an identifier for the person within a computing domain having the domain name portion designated by domainname.

72. A computer program embodied on a computer-readable medium, the computer program enabling the contacting of a person who has a universal point of contact identifier, the computer program comprising:

5 program code for entering the person's universal point of contact identifier into an initiating device:

program code for presenting, in response to entry of the universal point of contact identifier, indicators of a plurality of points of contact for the person;

program code for selecting one of the indicators; and

10 program code for contacting the person at the preferred point of contact indicated by the selected indicator.

73. The computer program of claim 72, wherein the person is contacted by automatically establishing a communication session between the initiating device and the point of contact indicated by the selected indicator.

74. The computer program of claim 72, wherein the person is contacted by presenting a mailing address corresponding to the selected indicator, and delivering a package to the mailing address.

75. The computer program of claim 72, wherein the universal point of contact identifier is an email address.

76. The computer program code of claim 75, wherein the email address consists of a user identification portion, a domain name portion and a demarcation symbol between the user identification and domain name portions.

77. The computer program of claim 76, wherein the email address is of the form userid@domainname, wherein userid is the user identification portion which is an identifier for the person within a computing domain having the domain name portion designated by domainname.

78. A method of contacting a person using an email address, comprising:

(a) receiving the email address input into an initiating device;

(b) locating, based on the email address, a plurality of point of contact information for contacting the person;

(c) sending a request for the person's preferred point of contact information, the request including at least a portion of the email address identifying the person;

(d) receiving the person's preferred point of contact information; and

(e) automatically establishing a communication session between the initiating device and a preferred point of contact specified in the preferred point of contact information.